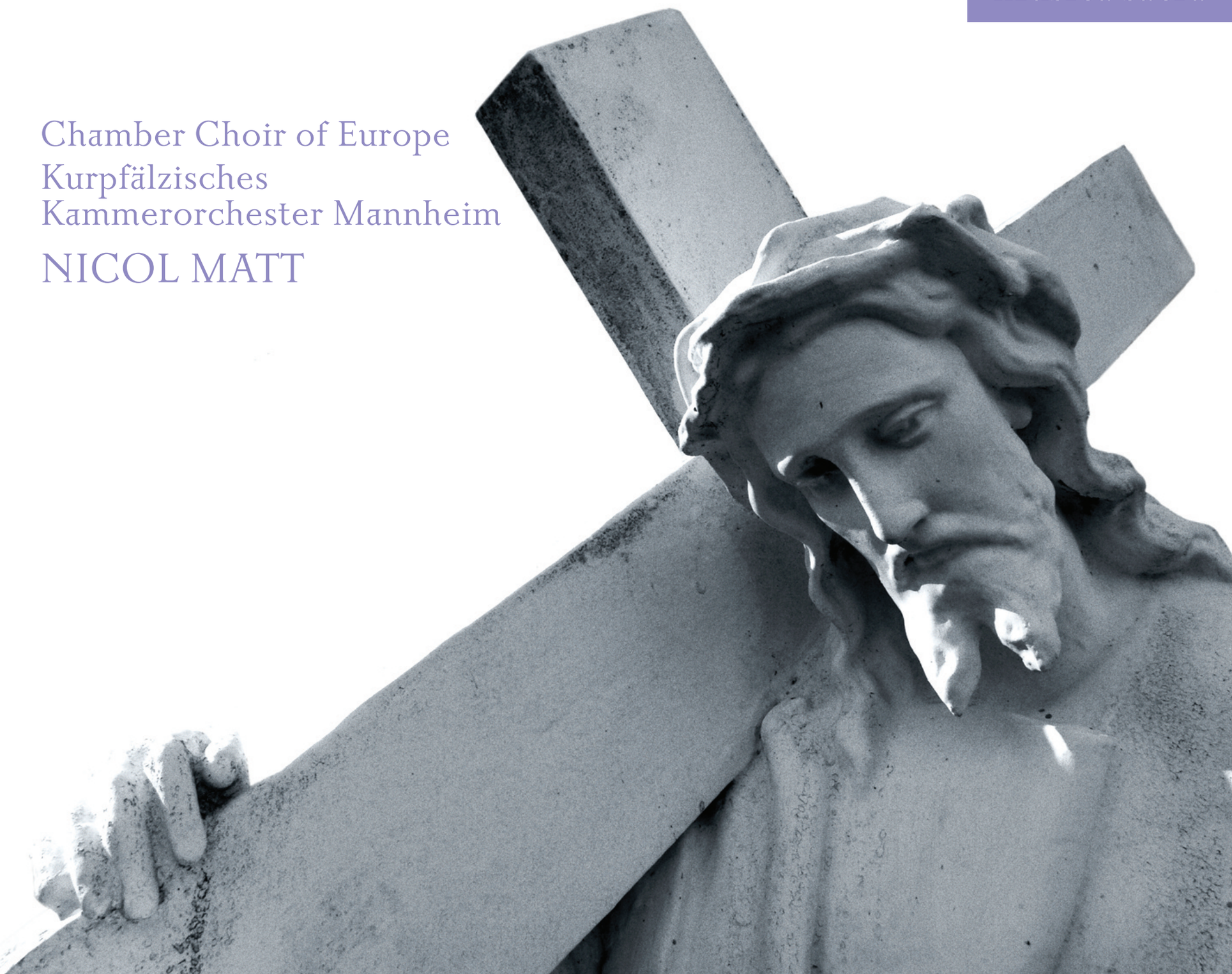
HAYDN

DIE SIEBEN LETZTEN WORTE
THE SEVEN LAST WORDS

oratorio version

BRILLIANT CLASSICS

Musica sacra



Chamber Choir of Europe
Kurpfälzisches
Kammerorchester Mannheim

NICOL MATT

Die sieben letzten Worte unseres Erlösers am Kreuze

The Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross is one of Haydn's least 'typical' works. Anthony van Hoboken, who divided his great list of Haydn's compositions into two volumes, one instrumental and one vocal, was obliged to place it both at the end of the first volume and at the beginning of the second, since it presents a rare case of an identical work existing in two versions, both with and without a text. How *Die sieben letzten Worte* came into being, and what subsequently happened to both completed versions, has no parallel in any other work written by Haydn during his exceptionally long career.

The orchestral version

When Haydn received a commission from Cádiz in Spain in 1785 to write ceremonial music for Good Friday, he was 53 years old and still in the service of Prince Esterházy, although his fame had spread throughout Europe by this point. The letter containing the commission described in detail the ritual to which Haydn's music had to comply: first there was to be an overture to set the tone for the occasion, then the bishop would pronounce the first of the seven words and deliver a short sermon on them. As he left the pulpit and knelt in front of the altar, with its depiction of Christ on the cross, the first Adagio would follow, lasting a maximum of ten minutes. After that, the bishop would mount the pulpit again to give a sermon upon the second phrase. Following this pattern, the remainder of the service would alternate words and music, with a closing movement that represented the earthquake that followed the Crucifixion. During the service, the walls, windows and pillars of the church were to be covered with black cloth, with light coming from a single lamp.

Haydn's composition consisted of an orchestral introduction, seven 'sonatas' (instrumental pieces, in the old sense of the term) and a fast movement inscribed *Terremoto* ('earthquake'). The first edition was published in 1787 by Artaria in Vienna; this included the orchestral version and a new arrangement for string quartet. The work's popularity spread rapidly throughout Europe and further editions were brought out in several European cities.

The oratorio

In 1794, on the way back from his second trip to London, Haydn visited the town of Passau on the Danube, where he found a new vocal transcription of his *Die sieben lezten Worte* being performed. The vocal parts and words had been written by the local choirmaster Joseph Friebert, drawing on excerpts from the poem *Der Tod Jesu* ('The Death of Jesus') by the contemporary poet Karl

Wilhelm Ramler, paraphrasing biblical quotations in a poetic idiom of the day that scarcely transcended banality.

Haydn liked the idea of the transcription but thought he could improve on Friebert's vocal parts, so settled down to work on the arrangement on his return to Vienna. He had Friebert's score sent to him from Passau and, interestingly enough, began composing the new vocal parts with considerable regard for this mediocre adaptation. However, as the work progressed, his creative fantasy made him less and less able to confine himself to the narrow margins of Friebert's ideas; from the middle of the work onward, Haydn's vocal parts increasingly deviate from those of the Passau choirmaster. Haydn's friend Baron van Swieten, a highly cultured connoisseur of music and amateur writer, who later wrote the German text for Haydn's two great oratorios *The Creation* and *The Seasons*, came to the composer's assistance: he made some alterations to Friebert's text so as to render it more poetic and expressive, and in several places corrected the clumsiness of the versification. Although Friebert had turned the biblical words preceding each of the sonatas into recitatives, Haydn abandoned this theatrical device in favour of having the words of Christ sung in four-part homophony by the choir.

The oratorio was published by Breitkopf und Härtel in 1801 and exceeded the popularity of the orchestral version. It became one of Haydn's most successful and performed works and, according to Griesinger, one of his earliest biographers, the composer considered it one of his greatest achievements.

The conditions attached to the commission gave *Die sieben letzten Worte* a rather curious musical form; Haydn himself wrote that 'the task of making seven adagios, each lasting ten minutes, follow one another without tiring the listener, was no easy matter: and I soon found myself unable to stick to the prescribed time'. Haydn avoided the monotony that a succession of slow movements might create through giving each a sharply defined profile of its own, varying each movement's form, key and orchestration. Every melody is carefully crafted to match Christ's words and convey their significance.

Most of the movements are in an early type of sonata form with short development sections, although Haydn treats this structure in a remarkably versatile manner. At times he recalls Classical sonata form by employing two contrasting themes (No.5), while in other movements he reverses the order of the themes in the recapitulation to open and close the sonata with an identical motif, creating a parenthetical effect (No.6). The second movement's form is unique: the exposition consists of a principal subject heard twice (in C minor and E flat major), while the development section is simply the same theme transposed into F minor. Perhaps the only formal feature common to all of the movements is a clearly sounded reprise.

Besides the seven sonatas there are three further movements. The opening Introduzione and closing *Terremoto* already existed in the orchestral version, but Haydn added the woodwind intermezzo between the fourth and fifth sonatas when he arranged the work as an oratorio. The Introduzione's mood is essentially tragic, beginning with a characteristic fortissimo motif played by the whole orchestra and featuring a prominent 'sighing' motif made up of an ascending minor second. Its form resembles that of a sonata with a freely treated recapitulation.

The intermezzo for woodwind is a masterpiece of Haydn's late period, notable for its use of the double bassoon, a rare instrument during this era. Its main melodic idea is a single four-bar subject, which reappears throughout the movement in different keys and instrumentation.

The closing chorus follows the seventh sonata without any break and is the only fast movement of the work. The effect of an earthquake is evoked by tremendous timpani beats, sforzati, frequent interruptions to the tempo and broad melodic leaps. The unrelentingly fierce pace of the movement brings the otherwise calm and meditative oratorio to a passionate, dramatic close.

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Chamber Choir of Europe

Anne-Katrin Herzog, Judith Erb, Katharian Hirsch, Marietta Fischesser, Shu-Fang Cheng
sopranos

Alena Leja, Birgit Meyer, Judith Ritter, Tina Reiche
altos

Daniel Schreiber, Gerhard Nennemann, Jörg Krause, Nils Giebelhausen
tenors

Jens Fischesser, Micha Häckel, Philip Niederberger, Marcus Stäbler
basses

1 Introduzione I

2 No.1

Vater, vergib Ihnen,
Denn sie wissen nicht was sie tun.
Vater im Himmel, o sieh hernieder
Von ewigen Thron!
Vater der Liebe, dein Eingeborener,
erfleht für Sünder,
Für deine Kinder erhöre den Sohn!
Ach, wir sind tief gefallen,
Wir sündigten schwer;
Doch allen zum Heil, uns allen,
Floss deines Sohnes Blut.
Das Blut des Lamms schreit nicht um Rach:
Es tilgt die Sünden.
Vater der Liebe, Pass uns Gnade finden,
Erhöre den Sohn!

3 No.2

Fürwahr, ich sag es dir:
Heute wirst du bei mir im in Paradiese sein.
Ganz Erbarmen, Gnad' und Liebe,
Bist du, Mittler, Gotteslamm !
Kaum ruft jener reuig auf zu dir:
Wenn du kommest in dein Reich,
Ach, so denke mein!
So versprichst du ihm voll Milde:
Heut' wirst du bei mir im Paradiese sein.
Herr und Gott! Blick auf uns!
Sieh an deines Kreuzes Fusse
Unsere wahre Reu' und Busse!
Sieh, o Vater, unsere Reue!
Gib uns auch zur letzten Stunde
Jenen Trost aus deinem Munde:
Heut' wirst du bei mir im Paradiese sein

4 No.3

Frau, hier siehe deinen Sohn,
Und du, siehe deinen Mutter!
Mutter Jesu, die du trostlos
Weinend, seufzend bei dem Kreuze standst.
Und die Qualen seines Leidens
In der Stund' des bittern Scheidens,
Siebenfach in dir empfandst.
Kaum mehr fähig, dich zu fassen,
Und doch standhaft und gelassen,
Nimmst als Sohn den treuen Jünger,
Und mit Ihm auch uns als Kinder an.
Mutter Jesu, o du Zuflucht aller Sünder,
Hör das Flehen deiner Kinder.
Steh uns bei im letzten Streit,
Mutter voll der Zärtlichkeit,
O steh uns allen bei!
Wenn wir mit dem Tode ringen,
Und aus dem beklemmten Herzen
Unsere Seufzer zu dir dringen.
Lass uns, Mutter, lass uns da nicht
unterliegen!
Hilf uns dann den Feind besiegen.
Und steh uns bei im letzten Streit!
Wenn wir mit dem Tode ringen,

O da zeige dich als Mutter,
Und empfehl' uns deinem Sohn,
O Mutter!

5 **No.4**

Mein Gott, mein Gott,
Warum hast du mich verlassen?
Wir sieht hier der Gottheit Spur?
Wer Kann fassen dies Geheimnis?
O Gott der Kraft und Macht,
O Gott der Macht und Stärke!
Wir sind deiner Hände Werke!
Und deine Liebe,
O Herr, hat uns erlöst.
O Herr, wir danken dir vom Herzen
Unser wegen littst du schmerzen,
Spott, Verlassung, Angst und Pein.
Wer sollte dich nicht lieben,
Dich mit Sünden noch betrüben?
Wer kann deine Huld verkennen?
Nein, nichts soll uns von dir trennen,
Allhier und dort in Ewigkeit.

6 **Introduzione II**

7 **No.5**

Jesus rufet: Ach, mich dürstet!
Hemmt nun die Rache, stillt eure Wut!
Menschen, lasset Mitleid euch erweichen,
Ruft Erbarmung in das Herz!
Jesus rufet: Ach, mich dürstet!
Ihm reicht man Wein, den man mit Galle mischet.
So labt man ihn.
Kann Grausamkeit noch weiter gehn?
Nun kann er nicht mehr fassen den Schmerz,
der
ihn allmächtig drückt,
der Wohltun War.
Ach, im Durst vor seinem Ende
reichet man ihm Galle dar!

8 **No.6**

Es ist vollbracht.
An das Opferholz geheftet,
Hanget Jesus in der Nacht;
Und dann ruft er laut:
Es ist vollbracht!
Was uns jenes Holz geschadet,
Wird durch dieses gut gemacht.
Weh euch Bösen, weh euch Blinden,
weh euch allen,
die ihr Sünden immer häuft auf Sünden!
Menschen denket nach!
Werdet ihr Erbarmung finden,
Wenn er kommt in seiner Herrlichkeit uns seiner Macht?
Rett uns, Mittler, Von Verderben!
Höre, Gottmensch, unser Schrei'n!

Lass dein Leiden und dein Sterben
Nicht an uns verloren sein!
Lass uns einst den Himmel erben
Und mit dir uns ewig freun.

9 No.7

Vater! In deine Hände empfehle ich
meinen Geist.
Nun steigt sein Leiden höher nicht,
Nun triumphiert er laut und spricht:
Nimm, Vater meine Seele!
Dir empfehle ich meinen Geist.
Und dann neigt er sein Haupt und stirbt.
Vom ewigen Verderben hat uns sein Blut
errettet,
Aus Liebe für uns Menschen
Starb er den Tod der Sünder.
Du gabst uns neues Leben,
Was können wir dir geben?
Zu deinen Füssen liegen wir, o Jesu, tief
gerührt,
Nimm unser Herz als Opfer an!

Das Erdbeben.
Er ist nicht mehr.
Der Erde Tiefen schallen wieder:
Er ist nicht mehr!

Erzittre, Golgatha, erzittre!
Er starb auf deinen Höhen,
O Sonne, fleuch
Und leuchte diesem Tage nicht:
Zerreisse, zerreisse, Land, worauf die
Mörder stehen!

Ihr Gräber, tut euch auf!
Ihr Vater, steigt an's Licht!
Das Erdreich, das euch deckt,
Ist ganz mit Blut befleckt.

10 Il Terremoto

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